

Again the Cuba Problem

Role of Soviet 'Expeditionary Force' Is Debated as Surveillance Continues

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Special to The New York Times.

New York

Caves Used for Munitions

The Cuban situation continued to be a major domestic and international issue last week, and despite Administration efforts to dampen public discussion, there was no end to the dispute in sight.

A Senate preparedness subcommittee, headed by Senator John Stennis, Democrat of Mississippi, is continuing its extensive and largely secret investigation of the entire Cuban problem. Hearings are expected to continue for at least two more weeks.

Both Democratic and Republican Congressmen continue to show interest and concern about Cuba and the President himself said publicly at his press conference that he was not satisfied with the rate of withdrawal of Soviet armed forces from Cuba.

The military situation on the island as described in published testimony by various Administration witnesses and amplified by other sources appears to be about as follows:

Still 17,000 Russians

Russian military forces are still estimated at about 17,000. Informed sources said privately this was only an estimate, but we do not know precisely how many Soviet personnel are in Cuba. The information is very hard to obtain, for Cuba is a police state.

The Russians do not ordinarily wear uniforms and most of their installations are heavily guarded and protected. The men tend to blend into the civilian population.

Soviet troops are now described as a small "expeditionary" force too small to threaten the United States, but large enough to insure the continued role of Fidel Castro's Communist Government and large enough to make Cuba a relatively secure base for the dissemination of propaganda and subversion in the Western Hemisphere.

Secretary of State Dean Rusk said last week that Russia was in the process of removing some troops from Cuba and that enough ships to transport several thousand were available. Privately, other sources were more pessimistic.

There is no evidence of any decrease of Soviet weapons in Cuba.

Four Soviet armored groups, roughly of battalion size, complete with tanks and guns, are still on the island.

The Army intelligence chief testified that many Cuban caves had been equipped as storage areas for weapons and equipment. But he made no public attempt to estimate exactly what was stored in them. He agreed, however, with the prevailing opinion in the intelligence community that all long-range missiles had probably been withdrawn from Cuba last year.

John A. McCone, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, told a House committee that Cuba was being used as a training base for "revolutionaries from other Latin American countries." He added that Cuban nationals had taken part in Peruvian disorders in December; that some guerrilla forces in Peru were "equipped with Czech weapons, that most probably came from Cuba" and that Cuba was furnishing "training, money, and propaganda materials but so far very little help to stir subversion and Communist insurrection in Latin American countries."

Mr. McCone's testimony thus contradicted a previous statement by Secretary of Defense

Robert F. McNamara that he had no evidence that Cuba was being used as a "base for subversion."

United States intelligence efforts in and around Cuba are still dependent upon four primary sources. These are ship surveillance, air reconnaissance, refugee reports, and communications intelligence all amplified, but not very fully and only after delays, by agent reports.

The ship surveillance gives an indication of the quantity and tempo, and sometimes the character of the supplies and personnel sent to Cuba, but it cannot detect what is hidden in the holds.

The air reconnaissance provides photographic coverage of all of Cuba. But it cannot disclose what is hidden in caves.

Refugee reports are numerous, but often misleading or exaggerated. They must be winnowed and then the kernels of hard information must be pieced together against each other. Communications intelligence is good, but it furnishes little spot information. Agents' reports are few and subject to delay.

No Secrets Spilled

One Democratic Senator said,

"last week that he had been amazed to learn of the small amount of 'hard' intelligence available on Cuba. However, Representative George Mahon, Democrat of Texas and chairman of the House military appropriations subcommittee, criticized all the talks about intelligence and said we have been revealing information 'detrimental to our best interests.'"

His comments were not confined to the Republicans, or for that matter to many Democrats and to much of the intelligence community. No secrets of intelligence gathering and no sources have been revealed by the testimony and discussion, it was held. But it has been shown, beyond doubt, by the testimony, investigations and discussions that Washington did not use all its intelligence resources in and around Cuba prior to the sudden crisis last fall and that it reversed normal intelligence estimating procedures and refused to heed indications that should have warned it.

Low level reconnaissance was not started until the week of crisis, and an intensive intelligence-gathering effort did not commence until long after the Cuban buildup had started. Nevertheless, there were many failures of this buildup and of the impending emplacement of missiles.

Normal Methods Not Used

But the normal intelligence process of adding piece to piece to produce the finished puzzle was not followed. For the prevailing climate of opinion in Washington — one propagated by the Russian experts in the Administration, by some in the White House staff and held by the President himself was that Premier Khrushchev would never risk the emplacement of nuclear-armed missiles in Cuba. This firmly held opinion discounted all the contrary indications.

Finally, we were so intent on the missile phase of the Soviet threat, that we ignored, or overlooked until a few days before the end of October, the fact that Russia had sent what intelligence experts now call a "small expeditionary force" to Cuba.

The continued Congressional interest in the Cuban situation last week was based on a fear — apparently justified by our intelligence data — that these same mistakes might be repeated.

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